DANCING AS WE SEE IT ON THE STAGE.—By Alan Dale.

Americanism and Youth Prove More Attractive to Present-Day Audiences Than Old-Time Science and Hidden Wrinkles.

Deyo, Who Leaves Skirt Dancing Severely Alone and Dresses Cleverly, Knows More of Our Taste Than Old-Time Stars.

As I watched pretty little Deyo the other afternoon sinuously introducing the very music of movement into that gaudy, multi-colored Rice-ean hotch-potch called "The Girl from Paris," at the Herald Square Theatre, all my old enthusiasm for one of the most fascinating of stage arts returned to me. I said to myself, "Why is it that dancing seems to be going to the dogs?" And echo answered "Why?" Certain it is that dancing has of late degenerated into a mere peg for sensationalism; and that nowadays you very rarely come across a dancer with the extreme youth, winsome femininity, unaffected good health, vigor and enthusiasm shown by this little Deyo, whom I saw for the first time, I believe, in "Excelsior, Jr."

Perhaps dancing, which is a distinct art, has suffered like a great many other good things in these days of shrieking sensationalism. Coarse and flimsy ladies have mutilated it to serve their own ends, and have used it as a means to pirouette their way into the sheen of publicity. It has deteriorated into a sort of vehicle for color and clothes, and there are very few women nowadays in whose untrammelled movements you detect the genuine rhythmic stream of graceful motion that flows from the twinkling limbs to the tips of the fingers, to the roots of the hair, through the spine and round the waist.

In a word, dancing is never offered nowadays to the public except in the disguise of a horrid fad. You go to see a hard-faced, huckleberry-eyed siren like Otero, because it has been announced that she owns large wads of "abandon," that she may possibly shock you by the lasciviousness of her alleged "art." No attempt is made to emphasize her possible possession of grace, enthusiasm or vigor. Those qualities are old-fashioned, dreadfully old-fashioned, don't you know, dear boy. You get 'em at dancing schools for select young people. You find 'em at insanely Puritanical social gatherings, where young Miss Whatsername, after being duly pressed by an exuberant hostess, is induced to stand up coyly on the well polished floor and indulge in her specialty for the edification of the guests.

Otero doesn't try to charm you, and wouldn't if she could. There's no "money" in charming nowadays. The book that is reviewed as "charming" is a dead loss to its publishers. The play that is criticised as "charming" is immediately withdrawn "owing to contracts out of town, which cannot be cancelled." The actor and actress who are "charming" cool their heels on the Winter Rialto, the dance that is "charming" is rarely discussed. Terpsichore has given birth to a fad, and if you ask how she is you will be answered, "As well as can be expected." E 1891

Loie Fuller and her imitators dealt a cruel blow to this lovely art. Miss Fuller's idea of "dancing" is to stand on a sheet of glass set in the wood of the stage, and wallow in colored lights thrown upon her from all directions, all the time moving a brace of scraggy arms, and turning on a self-satisfied, complacent smile. Electricians aid her, and calcium gentlemen work hard whenever she is before the public. Just think of electricity and mechanical contrivances being allowed to tamper with the sublimely ethereal art of dancing! Miss Fuller has never advertised herself as taking a colored electric bath, and enjoying it. Not a bit of it. She has persistently declared that she dances; that she is a symmetrical disciple of the supple muse; that her work is the inspiration of rhythm. And the public believed her. Whenever she was interviewed, Miss Fuller put on a fatigued and faraway look, and remarked, "I am tired out. The enthusiasm of the dance has wearied me. I must rest. I can endure no further effort."

In fact, Miss Fuller, whose cleverness is of the same sort as that of the man who invents a new corkscrew, or a new bicycle lamp, has deliberately encroached upon the domains of an art, and dragged that art into the banal light of mere ingenuity. And when a graceful, vigorous little maiden like Deyo steps forth and delights both men and women by the sincerity of her appeal, she is obliged to contend with the faddery and hobby-ism that have mildewed the subject. The fact that she can dance is at once apparent to everybody. It is also clear that she makes the very most of her brief splash into the hurdy-gurdy glories of "The Girl from Paris." What pained me when I saw her was that there was not enough of her work; that the management seemed afraid of allowing her to displace the sentiment of the piece. She veni'd and vidi'd and vici'd in the space of about five minutes.

My enemies are never tired of telling me that I made Cissy Fitzgerald famous by "booming" her wink. When they read this article they will undoubtedly say, "Oh, he needn't talk about Deyo. It's all very fine, but I remember what he wrote about Cissy's wink, and what it did for her." I plead guilty to the fostering of that pretty eyelid curtsey, but I did it only because Cissy's dance itself in "A Gaiety Girl" filled me with keenest appreciation. I saw a large, healthy, voluminous, yet graceful young woman, absolutely alive with the energy of the dance, and still able to wink nonchalantly during her work. I merely called attention to the phenomenon, and if the public preferred the wink to the dance, the public got it.

Even Cissy's wink has, however, grown stale. Other dancers have tried it as adjuncts to their art, but without the least success. Sensualism has crept into the dearest and most pellucid of the arts, and managers nowadays seek to supply the public with something "spicy" in the way of costume, with couchee-couchee suggestions, or with some tainted episode in the life of the dancer. Even youth is not looked upon as a sine qua non of success. Wrinkled ladies with corrugated pasts are perfectly competent "to dance their way into public favor"—as reporters say. Yet dancing should be a demonstration of the ebullient animal spirits of the arch and frisky maiden. It should be the apparently spontaneous poetry of youthful limbs and flexible anatomy.

Little Deyo has a future because she has begun early. She will probably go abroad, catch some of the "tricks" that are in the artistic atmosphere of the Old World, and return—a colossal success! American toes, like American voices, are probably the very best of the sort, and—if young women would but believe it—the American girl could become as famous with her feet as with her voice, if she chose to devote herself assiduously to their cultivation.

The classical dance—as you see it at the Metropolitan—excites ridicule nowadays, but it is a mighty good education to start in with. The premiere of Mr. Grau's company told me a few months ago—you may possibly remember my talk with Marthe Irmler—that her steps were the only ones taught in the schools of Paris, Berlin and Vienna. "People ask me very often," she said, "why Italian opera premieres never do anything new. Grand opera dancers belong to a certain school, and the teachings of that school never vary. We do not dare to do anything new in ballet, any more than grand opera composers ever dare to do anything new in operas. It is always the same thing, is it not? All operas are modelled upon the same plan, and the German, Italian and French ballet schools supply them with regular disciplined graduates. It is a regular system of education. I began when I was six, and until I was twelve I studied leg movements and graceful poses in Dresden. Then came hard work in earnest."

Yet the premiere danseuse of the ballet, classical as she may be and undoubtedly is, almost makes me laugh. Her smirk is so idiotic, and as she turns about like a five-cent tee-totum, with short tarletan skirts that make her look like an animated ostrich. I always wonder why such dancing is foisted upon us year after year with such malignant insistency. Of course, it is very good training, and in Deyo's pretty dance in "The Girl from Paris" it seemed to me that I detected a good deal of its influence.

This little girl doesn't look more than eighteen. When I asked for points in her career, I was told that she lived with mamma and was absolutely engrossed in the art of making custard pies and frying onions. She is not "wedded to her art," but she has undoubtedly worked at it. She has complete control of her limbs. Her toes are evidently her own—to do as she likes with, and women don't as a rule own their toes until they have completely subdued those very refractory members. A girl wins her fingers much easier than she does her toes, which, nowadays, are tabooed subjects, interviewed only by the chiropodist. Yet they are able, if properly managed, to contribute very largely to the art of dancing, and Miss Deyo thoroughly realizes that fact.

The little woman leaves skirt dancing severely alone; and she is wise. Skirt dancing has done as much to injure the real art as Miss Loie Fuller, Otero and others have done. It was the inane invention of "society," and it is as dead as a door nail. In reality it was not dancing at all, but a mere sensual manipulation of draperies destined to appeal to bald heads and callow youths.

The origin of skirt dancing is very amusingly told by George Bernard Shaw, the London satirist. "The stage is always liable," he said, "to the incursions of beauteous persons whose misfortune it is to be unable to dance at all, and who suffer from a similar disability in respect of singing or acting. Some excuse being necessary for the exhibition of their charms on the boards, an unskilled accomplishment had to be invented for them. And this was the origin of the skirt dance, a dance which is no dance. Thanks to which we soon had young ladies, carefully trained on an athletic diet of tea, soda water, rashers, brandy, ice pudding, champagne and sponge cake, laboriously hopping and flopping, twirling and staggering as nuclei for a sort of bouquet of petticoats of many colors, until finally, being quite unable to perform the elementary feat, indispensable to a courtsey, of lowering and raising the body by flexing and straightening the knee, they frankly sat down, panting on their half begging for an encore, half wondering how they would ever be able to get through one. The public on such occasions behaved with its usual weakness. It felt the charm of the petticoats, and it was mean enough to ape a taste for the poor girls' pitiful sham dancing, when it was really gloating over their variegated underclothing. Who has not seen a musical farce or opera interrupted for five minutes while a young woman, without muscle or practice enough to stand safely on one foot—one who, after a volley of wild kicks with her right leg, has, on turning to the other side of the stage, had to confess herself ignominiously unable to get beyond a stumble with her left, and, in fact, could not, one would think, be mistaken by her most infatuated adorer for anything but an object lesson in saltatory incompetence—clumsily waves the inevitable petticoats at the public as silken censers of that sensualism which is the real staple of five-sixths of our theatrical commerce?"

Deyo does not seek to revive skirt dancing. Skirt dancing is utterly foreign to the nature of the real American girl, who, when her enthusiasm has been awakened, throws herself at the most difficult feats of her art. Deyo wears a costume that is easy to dance in and charming to look at. That little satin Empire jacket (I wish I could describe it), supplementing the graceful petticoats, is an inspiration. It seems to say: "Even if I couldn't dance, you wouldn't be absolutely disappointed, for I am showing you something quite new in the way of terpsichorean clothes. But if you will watch me, I will try and prove to you that clothes don't make the woman. I have not selected my costume because I am anxious to distract your attention from my work. I want to give a happy combination of sartorial and saltatorial effect."

Dancing will "come in" again one of these days, and we shall have critics who will be able to give the public expert opinion on the subject. There is nothing in the least infra dig. about such an art. It is not necessarily a frivolity. The leg is a very pleasing portion of the anatomy. It has been cast into disrepute because it has been used so very much in living pictures. I might paraphrase the old proverb and remark that "Satan always finds some work for idle legs to do." There is no reason why legs should be idle. There is no reason why the dance should not become a fine art in the care of full-blooded, bubbling little artists like Deyo and a few others.

If some of our cut-and-dried leading ladies studied dancing, methinks that it would do them no harm. If they frankly sat down, panting on their knees, and looked piteously at the audience, tried to do what Deyo does—say after breakfast every morning for one hour—it would teach her how to walk, how to move gracefully, how to be supple and graceful. Virginia Harned, Blanch Walsh, Georgia Cayvan and a score of others whom I could mention would all be better actresses to-day if they realized the heavy responsibilities of owning legs.

Look at good old Mrs. Gilbert, of Daly's company. Mrs. Gilbert was a dancer in her day, and she is the most wonderful old actress alive at the present time. Her art kept her young, and it still keeps her young. Her years have already passed the allotted three score and ten, but Mrs. Gilbert can dance to-day more nimbly than many a young girl, and it fatigues her less than standing over that glassy lens to be washed in electric light fatigues the enigmatical Miss Fuller. And the same may be said of Agnes Booth. Mrs. Booth was also a dancer in her Australian youth. There is nothing cut-and-dried about the methods of Mrs. Booth. She still owns the most unflagging vivacity, the most girlish graces of form and figure, and the most untiring enthusiasm. All this goes to prove that dancing is not such an irrevocably futile accomplishment after all. When you see a little girl who can fling about her limbs and play pranks with her spine, and cheerfully smile—not smirk—through it all, as little Miss Deyo does at the Herald Square Theatre, you can go home and feel that you have assisted at a satisfactorily artistic performance. Youth is the most fascinating attribute of the dancer. She may be able to dance when she is forty or fifty with plenty of abandon and nonchalance, but when she has reached these ripe years I prefer to see her in long skirts, indulging in a less conspicuous occupation. Little Deyo may dance for seven or eight years longer, and at the end of that time she might develop into an interesting leading lady. One never knows.

The trouble with dancers is that they never learn the art of retiring gracefully with the advent of the first gray hair. Miss Irmler herself told me that there is no limit to the age of a dancer. "A woman can dance until her ankles grow weak," she said. "Of course, ankles give out in time. They are bound to do so, because the strain put upon them is enormous. When a ballet dancer begins to feel uncertain about her ankles, the end is in view. Then, again, she may lose all control of her back, which is another very dangerous symptom. A straight and unyielding back is absolutely necessary to her success" (which I don't believe). "The time comes when it aches and wearies, and the poor premiere knows that it is all over."

Perhaps Miss Deyo could tell the Irmler a few things that would surprise the more mature lady. She might hint at the fact that a straight back which suggests the swallowing of a poker is neither particularly graceful nor conducive to the sinuous movements that form the irresistible fascination of dancing. She might tell her the prestissimo vivacissimo accomplishment is the natural result of enthusiasm rather than of stereotyped schooling. Deyo bothers herself about no rules. She is not always saying to herself "I must keep my shoulders down and my head up in the flies. I must stiffen my spine, and indurate my ribs." She lets herself go, convinced that true poetry must occasionally say ta-ta to the conventions. The result is eminently satisfactory. When I saw it I felt, like Oliver Twist, inclined to ask for a "second serving." Mr. Rice, however, usually has other fish to fry. As long as he can get in his colors, his "picturesque" arrangements, his Isabella Urquhart-ian damsels with limbs that would support the elevated railroad structure, he is not going to pay particular attention to the mere art of dancing. Deyo comes on and does her little "turn," and the "quadrille" that precedes it interests Mr. Rice far more completely. When Deyo has been abroad and attracted attention Mr. Rice will want her for any salary she likes to name, and will advertise her as the great and only, who has danced before crowned noses and titled chins.

I picked up an old book by Professor L. de G. Brookes, on dancing, the other day, and it amused me very much indeed. It was published thirty years ago, but it is eminently interesting to-day. Mr. Brookes insists that both Socrates and Cato danced when they were past the age of sixty, and declares that Locke, in an essay on education, strongly advocates it. I wonder what those good old timers would think of the stamp-stamp of Otero, the inexhaustible draperies of Amelia Glover, and the strutting, complacent pirouettes of the assoluta in the opera ballet? Their good old hair would stand on paralyzed end at the iniquities of their favorite pastime.

The decay of dancing, however, is but temporary, I am inclined to believe. The art will regenerate itself. It is bound to do so, for its success depends upon mental and physical health. The girls who believe in it, and are discouraged at the base uses to which it has been put, may pluck up courage and work persistently. Their time will come. The vulgar advent of women who tack dancing to their list of accomplishments as they tack diamonds to their corsages will not annoy us very much longer. "On with the dance!" will be our cry, and the pleasantest of interludes will delight us once again. Just at present, as you note the incompetent women who are advertised as dancers, all you can do is to wonder what will ultimately become of them, when the public refuses to accept them as artistic exponents of a noble art. But as I watched the ingenuous, entertaining little Deyo at the Herald Square, the other afternoon, I felt refreshed and at ease, for I realized the fact that sane women and healthy men are still able to enjoy wholesome, unsophisticated art, and that the Terpsichorean frauds are really—if I may so put it—on their last legs. The vogue of "twinkling limbs" slumbers, but is not dead. The subject—rather a fascinating one, don't you think?—is worth pondering over.

ALAN DALE.

DEYO

THE SONG OF THE LARK.

Here Are the Exact Musical Notes of the Beautiful Feathered Songster.

As far back as 1650 lovers of nature have tried to fix the song of the lark on paper: that is, write it out in notes that can be reproduced by voice or musical instrument. The first composer to transcribe the song of the lark was the Jesuit father, Athanasius Kircher, author of the now very rare work, "Musurgia Universalis," published in the middle of the seventeenth century. But this attempt was not entirely successful, or else the lark of olden times did not sing as well as the little bird we know.

A German schoolmaster has recently published the song of the up-to-date lark, given in the accompanying illustration, and friends of nature, as well as musical people generally, are equally pleased with the composition. As the lark begins her "Tirall-tirala" toward the end of February, readers of the Sunday Journal will soon be able to verify the German version.